Interviewer: *[Side conversation]*

Hi. So, what are sort of your first memories, your first impressions of Marion Barry, especially, you know, the – well, the '78 campaign for mayor even before that, if there is?

Interviewee: Well, *[glitch interferes with audio]*.

[Side conversation]

I was in the secretary of the District of Columbia office, Martin [unintelligible]'s office, one day, and I had been trying to get in to see Mayor Walter Washington for some time, you know, about some issues. And I watched as Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse hopped down the hall and were able to get in to see the mayor with no problem, and my question to Martin [unintelligible] is, "They don't vote for him. Why could they get to see him before I can?" Do you understand what I'm saying? So, Marion's election was a breath of fresh air. One of the things I remember, though, is I had worked at the city council when he was there, and I was working for Reverend Douglas Moore. And what happened was, I had done something that ran afoul of the Hatch Act, and so I was terminated.

And I went to apply for unemployment compensation –

Interviewer: When was this?

Interviewee: That was in 1978. And so – this is just as Marion was elected. And I had gone to the unemployment compensation office to sign up for benefits, and so, say, for instance, my number was 45, okay? I noticed that they started calling numbers that were higher than my number. And most of the people whose numbers they were calling were white, and so I raised a question about that is, "How are these people getting called ahead of me?" So I went running down to the mayor's office, and met with Ivanhoe Donaldson, and he said, "Do you have a problem with that?" and I said, "Yes." So he took me in to Marion, and they sent me down to the Department of Employment Service, on a contract, initially, to look at problems there.

And then eventually, the mayor supported me, Marion Barry supported me being the executive secretary to the District of Columbia Unemployment Compensation Board, and special assistant to the director of the agency. And as such, I rewrote the rules for the Unemployment Compensation Board to, in some ways, take into consideration justifiable reasons for leaving a

person's work. One was racism, because racial discrimination had never been considered as a justifiable reason for leaving work. Pregnancy – there were some mothers that I rewrote the rules to include. So, my experience with Marion was one that was very positive when he became the mayor.

Interviewer: And had you known him before?

Interviewee: Oh, sure – oh, we go back a ways. I first met him when he was in the Black United Front, when I was there, and this was a little bit before he created Pride Incorporated. And I knew him when he was in Pride. I remember one night when, you know, Pride owned a gas station up on 14th and Euclid Street, and somehow there was a little disturbance up there and the police were going to arrest Marion for something. And he and Mary Treadwell were in the gas station office, and so we went up there to help them, that night. So, yeah, I remember some of the things that were happening. I mean, I knew him before he became mayor. I knew him when he was on the city council, you know, I would see him almost daily when I was working down at the city council. I worked for the budget committee, and he was very much interested in the operations of the budget committee, how we would help to shape what was coming out of the council, at that time.

Interviewer: Sure, I read one of the position papers he issued when he was on the council, and one of his major issues was he wanted to be able to tax people who lived outside the district but worked in the district.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, one of the things, I mean, you know, it certainly, you know, both of the people he ran against in 1978 were black, and I think pretty much every political opponent he ever had was black. But there was some sort of feeling – there seems to have been some sort of feeling surrounding him, that he was the authentically-black candidate, or just the proudly-black candidate? Is that something you saw?

Interviewee: There may have been some people who felt that way. My position on it was that he was an activist, okay? He had earned his stripes as an activist. He was there in the streets with people when there were issues, he was fighting for social justice, economic justice. So, you know, I mean, his opponents were establishment people, people who would be viewed as being instruments of the Board of Trade and the Federal City Council, the economic interests here in town.

And Marion was seen as an activist who had struggled against those interests, to ensure that the average person in this town, the persons who were kind of left out of the system, would be given a voice.

Interviewer: And there's something very – yeah, his activism was definitely what set him apart throughout his career, it seems. But the thing that struck me, I was looking at the oral history that Betty King is putting together, and one thing that struck me, everyone who mentioned it mentioned how much support he got from white people. Did you see that, and do you know what that was about?

Interviewee: What was this now Betty King said? *[glitch interferes with audio]*.

Interviewer: Well, it wasn't just Betty King –

Interviewee: *[Crosstalk]* the support he got from white people?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, but he did get support from white people, there's no doubt about that, I mean, that was the reality. But I can't say the white folks [unintelligible] say that they were the determinant factor in his election. Surely, Walter Washington [unintelligible] and other candidates, you know, you could look all around the city and see there were people who had different constituencies in the city. And I think that he won the wards that were necessary for him to win, and like I'm saying, the view that I have is that he was a candidate who would address concerns of black folks.

Interviewer: Oh, no, that's definitely true, and it's also, you know, he won by about 1,300 votes, so there's no one factor when your victory is that narrow.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: But, I mean, he won Ward Three, and a lot of people were surprised about that, and I guess I kind of am, too. Do you know what his appeal was in heavily-white precincts?

Interviewee: Well, in many respects, Marion had worked on the school board and in the council, to bridge the gap between various communities. So, you know, he was a candidate who sought to bring these communities together. And by the way, you could see that in the appointments that he made when he became mayor. But again, you know, from my perspective – and I'm looking at where I lived and

the folks that I was working with and concerned about – is that he was gonna do something for those people *[glitch interferes with audio]*.

Interviewer: And it seems like he – I haven't been able to look at the numbers, yet, but it certainly seems like it was a priority of his and of his campaign to sign up new voters, to make sure and to get people to the polls who didn't necessarily vote all the time. Because, you know, if you're leapfrogging the sitting mayor and the president of the city council, you have to be doing something different, right?

Interviewee: Right. Well, you know he was a grassroots organizer, I mean, that's what he did *[glitch interferes with audio]*. And again, you know, his focus was on getting people out there, you know, much the way we're trying to do now today is to get people to come out to vote. And he was successful in doing that, organizing at the grassroots level. Remember, now, Pride Incorporated was an organization that was at a grassroots level, and Catfish Mayfield and other folks were grounded in the community. So, you know, their [attempt] was to ensure that we got people out to vote.

Interviewer: And that seems to be exactly what happened.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you know – can you tell me a little bit about his first term as the mayor, and how that all panned out, and what he was trying to do, and how it all worked out?

Interviewee: Well, like I was saying to you earlier, I got a job at the Department of Employment Services. Let me tell you what was significant about that. He did something that I thought was just great: he put two people that he knew, into every agency. And so, every month, we met with them to give them feedback about what was happening at those particular agencies. So, he was able to get a handle on where the problems were in that agency, the things that would need attention, the things that were good, the things that were not working well. And so, it gave him an opportunity to try to address those issues, to make it more efficient, and to make them able to deliver the services in the way that they should be delivering services.

So, that was something I would never have seen – well, I know Walter Washington didn't do it, so that was our first opportunity really to work with the mayor. But I'm just saying, this was something I think that was unique, but it was Marion Barry trying

to make that change, so that the government would work for the people.

Interviewer: And, you know, he obviously wasn't the first – he wasn't the first mayor under home rule, but in some ways he kind of felt like he was, wasn't he?

Interviewee: Yes, yes, most definitely, *[crosstalk]* difference between appointed mayor, you know, and – like I say, there was a distinct difference between the way he saw government working and the way the previous mayor did. The previous mayor just tried to continue what was already in existence, do you understand what I'm saying? That we had a commissioner form of government, and then, the reorganization plan number three, in 1967, brought together the city council and the mayor. But that was merely a continuation of the commissioner system, and Marion broke that up. He gave us a real elected mayor [unintelligible] Walter Washington was elected _____ _____, but I'm just saying, this was the first time we had broke, we had severed all ties from what you would consider the three-commissioner form of government.

Interviewer: Okay. And obviously, Mayor Barry ran into problems in later years. Do you think being mayor did something, you know, the circumstances of being mayor did something to change the way he was? Or what do you think happened?

Interviewee: *[Brief silence]* I believe that, when you talk about the problems he ran into, I just think that he was being Marion, and he was himself and he was genuine. And so, yeah, it's unfortunate that he had the problems, but he was able to come back from those. And I think that his heart, his intent, was always to do what was right for the people. And, you know, he may have done some things that hurt himself, but I don't think he ever did anything that hurt the city.

Interviewer: Yeah, and, I mean, it seems like that sort of grassroots support that he built throughout his life, sort of, that really gave him a base of support that really endured, didn't it?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, well, thanks much, and you said there were some other people you might be able to put me in touch with?

Interviewee: No, I'm saying there might be some other people that you could reach. I know of one person, but that person had a stroke and – but

they were very close, went to work in his office when he first *[crosstalk]*. But –

Interviewer: Okay, I was just curious if you had any phone numbers or something like that.

Interviewee: No, no, I'm sorry about that.

Interviewer: Not a problem.

Interviewee: Lemme just tell you, a lot of people have passed away. I mean, I'm fortunate to still be alive, you know? *[Laughs]* So many folks that were a part of that era, a part of the Barry time, are not here anymore.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know, that's why I wanna get this down.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: All right, well, thank you very much, and if I can give you a call if there's something else *[crosstalk]*.

Interviewee: Any time, and I hope that I've helped you in terms of what you're trying to do _____.

Interviewer: Oh, very much, thanks much.

Interviewee: Okay, you take care.

Interviewer: You, too.

Interviewee: Goodbye, now.

[End of Audio]